

Plague Piper

Marek Lukášík 514523

Target audience: players with an interest in dungeon crawlers/steampunk willing to learn new game mechanics in exchange for a unique experience

Gamer type: explorer, achiever, strategist

Target platforms: PC, possibly portable to consoles

Genre: dungeon crawler meets strategy, emphasis on looting and exploration

Number of players: 1

High Concept Statement:

In a Victorian-era world, Augustus, a highly intelligent rat and one of the first to be credited with harnessing steam power during the Industrial Revolution, faces banishment due to the city's fear of rat-borne diseases. Players assume the role of Augustus with a dark motive born from wrath – to unleash a devastating plague upon the city's populace. This game blends strategic gameplay, exploration, and customization, offering a unique dungeon crawler set within a 3D spatial environment where rooms are intricately connected through a complex network of pipes. As players navigate this labyrinth, they scavenge fallen enemies for parts to build their exoskeleton, forge alliances with less-intelligent rat companions, and collect potent pathogens, all in pursuit of their goal to brew and spread a cataclysmic infection far and wide.

Core mechanics: Story -> Explore -> Fight -> Improve -> Strategize

Feature Set:

- **Story** animated introduction to the game (inspiration Darkest Dungeon intro), tells the main character's recent history, and how he ended up in his sticky situation; later on, throughout the gameplay, the player discovers pieces of the main character's past through short monologues/dialogues. Individual runs are accompanied with a short story which is tied to the run's location.
- **Explore** 3D node network interconnected with pipes; *nodes* = different rooms, mostly enemies, but also "treasure" (archetypal: The Binding of Isaac etc..), "crafting room"...; room types, layout etc. chosen by random from a pre-created set. One "final room" (city inhabitant's apartment/house) per node network ("per run"). Pipe system gives the player multiple choices of how to get from point A to point B; the game's nature encourages the player to explore every room for best chances to get the highest score (no. of infected/killed people). Pipes are also the location where rat companions, and other fight-aiding elements can be found. Less usual random enemy encounters.
- **Fight** occurs in the rooms (nodes), real-time combat with preparation phase not limited by time - preparation phase = tactical window - the player has a chance to see the room's layout and the enemy type (room visibility based on number and position of cracks in the walls and other see-through parts of the room) - they can prepare their exoskeleton, abilities, from where they and their rat companions will "drop into" the room, possibly prepare their first attacks. Fight itself is rather challenging, emphasising melee combat as the barebones option, with ranged options available (using semi-developed diseases and mutated pathogens, using rat companions...). The player can eat companion rats to regenerate. Occasional random encounters in the pipes are without the preparation phase.
- **Improve** Collect parts from dead enemies to build and improve your exoskeleton - archetypal drop relationship harder enemy -> better drops. Use pathogens to infect parts of exoskeleton. Exoskeleton built mostly from organic matter, but can be reinforced with

scavenged scrap. Exoskeleton pieces can be exchanged during any phase of the game except real-time part of the fights through menu-based equipment showcase. Any modification to exoskeleton or “disease brewing” from pathogens is done in special “crafting rooms”.

- **Strategize** While most of the strategy happens during the game, the player tries to complete individual objectives usually consisting of infecting a given number of people for current location. The final room - endgame of each run - is a populated house/apartment or a public area, where the player releases this run’s disease. If the player manages to survive all the difficulties up to here, they have few options on how to spread their disease: infecting different water supplies, aggressively infecting as many people by direct contact, spreading air-borne pathogens, infecting a new animal host for your disease; all while utilising rat companions. Each pathogen combination is effective with different modes of spreading, each location is immune to different pathogens. Disease creation similar to Plague Inc.

Player experience goals:

- **Adrenaline** -> during combat, random encounters, creepy atmosphere
- **Getting better and planning ahead** -> finding out what works for different enemy types, finding new better ways for disease creation
- **Exploration** -> Main storyline and story bits, hidden places, atmospheric pipe network and city locations, new enemies.

Team roles:

- **Coder** everything
- **Artists** concept, 2D, 3D, UI, animation, effects
- **Designer / Tester** preparation phase and battle system, progression, disease creation, handmade room layouts, enemies, skills, balancing
- **Writer** main story, monologues, dialogues, hidden scenes, item descriptions

The Competition

The idea is heavily inspired by the steampunk theme for the story setting, narrative elements and overall visuals and feel. There are multiple titles serving as a foundation for Plague Piper’s atmosphere (Darkest Dungeon, Fallout series, Dishonored, Vaporum). Vaporum also serves as inspiration for exoskeleton mechanics, with the initial idea influenced by “Pickle Rick”. Core mechanics are built on an improved dungeon crawling system, and disease creation plays around with Plague Inc. ideas and game’s mechanics. I am also aware of the similarity the story base bears with Ratatouille, but that is purely unintentional and it was inspired more by being close to pet rats, than to this Disney movie.

Compelling aspects / USP

This game represents a mixture of dungeon crawler and strategy which hypothetically makes use of unique mechanics. Seemingly comedic aspects of the intro soon transform into a serious story full of rats, disease and death, all fitting into the game’s main theme, Victorian-era steampunk.